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TALKING POINTS FOR ADDI'S APPEARANCE BEFORE THE HOUSE
PERMANENT SUB-COMMITTEE FOR INTELLIGENCE, 13 MAY 1986

CHERNOBYL: POLITICAL FALL-OUT

- o The Chernobyl nuclear accident will have significant political repercussions inside the USSR. At the least, it will break Gorbachev's momentum and disrupt his efforts to inspire optimism among the public.
- o Regime's handling of the crisis:
 - The regime badly bungled public relations in the first days--reacting in the traditional Soviet fashion of trying to conceal from its own population and from the world that there had been an accident.
 - Once it became clear that Western intelligence could independently assess the disaster, that Soviet citizens were hearing about it from foreign sources, and that a large-scale evacuation would be required, Moscow shifted its approach.
 - By claiming the West is slandering the USSR and trying to gain political capital from the accident, Moscow hopes to appeal to the xenophobic instincts of the population and to deflect popular criticism of the regime.
 - By disclosing more about Chernobyl the authorities are trying to persuade citizens that the leadership is leveling with them and is acting to minimize health risks, while demonstrating to foreign governments that they are behaving responsibly.
- o In an effort to absolve top leaders of responsibility, Soviet authorities are blaming local officials for mishandling the situation.
 - Boris Shcherbina, head of the investigating commission, has reportedly said that local experts didn't assess the accident accurately. Pravda reported on 12 May that two transportation officials at the plant and a plant party secretary had been punished for failing to respond to the needs of evacuees and for providing delayed and inaccurate information on the disaster.
 - Ukrainian party leader Vladimir Shcherbitskiy could be held responsible. Gorbachev has been widely suspected of wanting to get rid of him. A public statement by Ukrainian Premier Aleksandr Lyashko was defensive about the initial handling of the disaster, suggesting republic officials were under criticism.

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- o Scapegoats may also be sought within the central party and government apparatus in Moscow. Leading the list of potential targets are:

- Vladimir Dolgikh, the party secretary in charge of the energy sector, one of two Brezhnev holdovers in the Secretariat. His failure to head the commission investigating the accident could spell trouble for him.
- In the government, Power Minister Mayorets is the official most directly responsible for the power plant. He was criticized for inefficient management at the party congress earlier this year.
- Other party or government officials responsible for the nuclear, civil defense, environmental, or health sectors could also come under attack.

- o Impact on popular attitudes:

- Reporting indicates considerable anxiety in Kiev, although there has been no panic.
- From the beginning of the crisis, the public appears to have made a special effort to listen to Western short-wave radio accounts. Most citizens probably believe the truth lies somewhere between what they hear from foreign sources and the pacifying message provided by Soviet media, and there is some popular resentment over the regime's failure to provide complete and timely information.
- The regime may also be damaged by perceptions that it did not do enough to protect public health and from electricity shortages that may result from the disabled power reactors. Ukrainians, many of them already resentful of Moscow's domination of their republic, may be especially watchful of how the regime treats evacuees and those people remaining.
- On the other hand, a lack of awareness about the types of safeguards used in Western power plants to minimize radiation releases will help to soften Soviet citizens' resentments about Chernobyl.

- o Impact on policy debate:

- The accident will nevertheless highlight environmental and worker safety concerns. In recent years, hazardous conditions in industry have become more important as a source of low worker morale and have on occasion given rise to protest activity. Some scientists have lobbied for more attention to safety problems in the nuclear power industry.
- The accident may have heightened friction within the Politburo over propaganda policy --how much information about domestic problems to give the population on what subjects. If the Politburo decides that it was a mistake not to disclose more details of the accident sooner, those such as Gorbachev and Moscow party boss Yeltsin who have pushed for greater candor could benefit. Recent inconsistencies in the media--about when the evacuation began and whether the fire in the reactor has been extinguished, for example--may indicate high-level disagreements over

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the "openness" issue.

o Impact on Gorbachev

-- Gorbachev has remained in the background in dealing with the Chernobyl incident, allowing other Soviet leaders to assume high profile roles during the crisis.

He may have believed his visible public involvement would have increased public alarm.

He may not want to speak until it is clear that things are under control so as to avoid giving reassurances that may turn out to be unduly optimistic.

By distancing himself from the accident, he may hope to avoid being held personally responsible.

-- But if he doesn't emerge soon to address the issue personally, his reputation as an accessible, take-charge leader willing to tackle problems head-on will suffer.